

## Roe Statement on Democratic Health Care Proposal

WASHINGTON, DC &ndash; Congressman Dr. Phil Roe (TN-1) made the following opening statement at the House Education & Labor hearing regarding the Democratic health care legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives this week:

Mister Chairman, when I first started thinking about running for Congress two and a half years ago, I was energized by the opportunity to come to Washington and work to reform health care. Most people I've seen over the years as a physician like the quality of the care they receive, but they don't like the cost. They want the care they need at an affordable price without unnecessary interference from insurance companies or government bureaucrats.

We are trying to fix the system for patients like the one in my district who one day woke up to discover she had a lump in her neck and was without health insurance. She couldn't afford health insurance and had to get rid of her assets to go on Medicaid. Our goal should be making health insurance more affordable so that woman can get the care she needs rather than have to give away nearly everything she has to qualify for a government plan.

Everyone in this room is committed to helping that patient and millions like her. That's good news. You have agreement on both sides of the aisle that there is waste in how we spend our health care dollars and that we can very easily get more bang for our buck by reforming the health insurance industry and encouraging patients to live healthier.

Early on in the year, I laid out a series of principles I would use to evaluate any health care reform proposals this Congress considered. My principles included:

1. Preventing government-run health care.
2. Preventing the destruction of a system that works for 80 percent of Americans to extend coverage to the remaining Americans.
3. Ensuring that doctors and patients are in charge of making medically-necessary decisions.
4. Making quality health insurance more affordable to achieve universal access.
5. Protecting against catastrophic costs.
6. Giving patients more ownership to improve portability.
7. Making sure everyone has "skin in the game."
8. Eliminating the insurance industry's ability to profit by avoiding the sick.

The proposal before us today falls short of meeting these principles. Additionally, at a time of record unemployment and mounting debts and deficits, this proposal sets the stage for more job losses by requiring small businesses and entrepreneurs to foot the entire bill for this health care expansion. A basic economic principle says that if you increase employers costs up to 8 percent, as this bill would do, employers will cut costs by cutting jobs and salaries.

Today, we will hear from some on the other side of the aisle who for years have advocated the dismantling of our current means of delivering care to patients in favor of a single-payer, government-run system. At least they have the honesty to

be up front about their desire for government run health care.

Today's bill and its so-called "public insurance option" is an exercise in subterfuge. The misnomer given to this government-run health care plan has been word-smithed and poll tested to mislead people into thinking they have a choice between government-run health care and the health care they receive today. But the bill sets up a process in which ONLY the government plan can survive.

Unbiased studies all indicate many employees who have coverage today through their employer will lose it if this bill is passed. The Lewin Group – respected in Washington as a completely independent analysis group – estimated that 106 million employees would lose employer-sponsored coverage under this bill. This bill undermines the President's promise to allow you to keep coverage you like.

What you won't hear about from the other side of the aisle is how the exact same program being advanced today failed in Tennessee 15 years ago when we tried to achieve universal coverage. Initial cost estimates for our TennCare program were unbelievably low, as for 10 years we watched our Medicaid program's cost go from unsustainable to crippling the state budget. Skyrocketing costs forced our Democratic governor to cut the rolls and fix the program. This bill learns none of the lessons from TennCare's mistakes.

In five minutes, I can't possibly point out all the problems with this bill. There are tax increases on poor, middle-class and wealthy individuals. There are tax increases on small, medium and large employers. There is an attempt to centralize control over health care benefits in the federal bureaucracy, but then jurisdiction is divided up between about 10 different authorities, which will ensure endless delays and red-tape to getting individuals the care they need. There are provisions that will result in less medical technology and innovation. Ultimately, we will spend between one and four trillion dollars and still won't achieve universal coverage.

The worst part of all this for me as a physician, however, is that this will prevent doctors from providing patients the care they need. Patients are ultimately the losers under a government-run system because care decisions are no longer made based on medical necessity, but based on a budget. Once the budgeted amount has been spent, we ration care by creating waiting lines. It's what happens in every other industrialized nation with government-run health care, including Canada and England, and there's no reason to think it won't happen here.

Over the next two or three days, we will give our colleagues on the other side of the aisle an opportunity to change course and reject the heavy hand of government being laid out in this plan. Democrats can choose to join us in trying to fix the existing system rather than creating a whole new bureaucracy filled with its own problems. They can make a bipartisan effort to put patients in charge of their health care decisions rather than Washington bureaucrats. They can prevent further damage to our economy. In doing so, we can bring about the kind of health care reform that Americans deserve.

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